



DEPARTMENT OF  
**GAME & INLAND  
FISHERIES**  
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### **For Immediate Release**

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## **COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA AND U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE ANNOUNCE PUBLIC ACCESS ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

RICHMOND, VA — The Commonwealth of Virginia and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) announce the launch of a new program to help Commonwealth citizens with the development of public recreation access to Shenandoah Valley rivers. This new program, named “*Support to Partners – Shenandoah River Watershed*,” is a partnership through the DuPont-Waynesboro Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) settlement among the Commonwealth, the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF) and USFWS. These NRDA trustees have dedicated monies to enhance or create recreational fishing access on reaches of South River, North Fork Shenandoah River, South Fork Shenandoah River, Mainstem Shenandoah River, or tributaries. DGIF staff developed criteria for evaluating recreational access with partners from multiple agencies. An oversight committee will review all submitted proposals.

“Support to Partners is a critical step toward improving recreational access to the legendary Shenandoah River,” said Secretary of Natural Resources, Matthew J. Strickler. “This program and ongoing conservation and restoration projects will help offset the damage caused by past toxic pollution.”

Mercury from industrial activities at the former E.I. du Pont de Nemours and Company (DuPont) facility in Waynesboro, VA, contaminated the South River and South Fork Shenandoah River, impacting fish, wildlife, and their habitats, including over 100 miles of river and associated floodplain and riparian habitat. Recreational fishing opportunities were also impacted from the mercury contamination, due to the fish consumption advisory on the South River and South Fork Shenandoah River.

“We look forward to working with our Virginia co-trustee to review and select projects to improve fishing and recreation within the Shenandoah River watershed,” said U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Northeast Regional Director Wendi Weber. “These new access areas will restore losses of fishing opportunities due to contamination, and give communities more chances to connect with this treasured resource.”

Trustees for the Commonwealth and the USFWS have determined that the most effective approach to administer this program is to establish the *Support to Partners* program for these specific funds. The concept is for local government partners or non-governmental organizations to locate, secure, and develop public recreation access for fishing and wildlife viewing along these waterways that will complement the series of access areas that are already in place. While no match is required, match funding will be considered during review of project proposals. Review of proposals will also take into account any associated natural resource restoration opportunities such as planting streamside buffers and dam removal.

The DuPont-Waynesboro settlement identified “recreational fishing access creation/improvement” as a preferred project category that will provide compensation for the injuries to recreational fishing. Possible projects may involve boating, bank fishing, and/or wading activities, and also swimming and wildlife viewing. Projects may include addition of new locations and/or improvements to existing facilities. Improving boating public access may also include dam removal projects that open stretches of a river to boating and fishing.

For more information about the application and process, please visit [www.dgif.virginia.gov/strategies-for-partners](http://www.dgif.virginia.gov/strategies-for-partners). Application materials will be forthcoming on the DGIF website.

A decision will be made no later than December 31, 2019 as to whether acceptable projects will receive funding.

If you have questions regarding the *Support to Partners – Shenandoah River Watershed* program, please contact call 540-248-9370.

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